United Nations A/S-27/22

General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 May 2002

Original: English

Twenty-seventh special session

Summary of round tables on the theme "Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade"

Round table 3

Friday, 10 May 2002 (morning)

Co-Chairs: Mr. Sher Bahadur **Duba**, Prime Minister of Nepal
Mr. Levy **Mwanawasa**, President of Zambia

> *"Listen to what we have to say, because it will help you make the right decisions for us ... and with us."*
> Sara Mendic, Yugoslavia

> *"We need you to believe in us and invest in us."*
> Ngenfat Yang, Suriname

1. Two child delegates set the tone for the round-table discussion. Sara Mendic of Yugoslavia spoke about the need for education and schools that are fit for children, saying that poor quality schools "can make us study but they cannot make us learn". Ngenfat Yang of Suriname stressed the lifelong toll that abuse and exploitation take on children, asking participants to "imagine the many children who are abused ... who are sold ... who don't have families to care for them" and asking, "where is their future?" Other young people joined the round table as part of their national delegations, speaking about violence in the home, drug abuse and the rights of indigenous children.

2. A number of themes arose throughout the discussion. The question of resources was perhaps the main theme, because adequate resources are vital to achieving the goal of "A world fit for children". The round table heard many calls for meeting international targets for official development assistance and for increasing resources for programmes benefiting children and women. There was a call for good governance and investment in people, as well as claims that aid for children not be subject to conditionalities. All participants agreed that the cycle of poverty must end if children are to have a good future. There were calls for fairer trading systems and open markets and for economic solutions that look at the realities of countries today.

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3. HIV/AIDS is threatening the lives of children, especially in Africa, where the gains of the last 50 years have been lost in the last 5 to 10 years. In addition to drugs at reduced or preferential prices, countries need appropriate infrastructures, clinics, trained health workers, voluntary counselling and testing, as well as clean water. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Kunio Waki, said that we have to trust young people and empower them by educating them about reproductive health.

4. Many participants stressed the importance of paying special attention to the needs and rights of girls to adequate nutrition, education and protection from abuse and exploitation, especially given the dangers of HIV/AIDS. In many families, girls still do not go to school because parents cannot afford fees for all their children and so send only the boys to school.

5. Education remains critical to children's development as productive and happy members of society, beginning with pre-school through primary and secondary school. The particular importance of quality primary education was stressed and there were calls for quality education that trains children for our changing world, teaching them new skills, including entrepreneurship, science and technology. There must be adequately trained teachers. Access to computers and the Internet are critical for bridging the digital divide. Children must also learn about things that interest them and develop their creativity, as one of the young delegates pointed out. Children must learn tolerance and respect for others and for the environment. They must be taught about their rights so that they, in turn, may educate their families.

6. There were a number of comments about corporal punishment in schools, with some speakers saying it was accepted in their countries. Ngenfat Yang said that he had been hit and told he was dumb, and that there should not be a "bossy" relationship between students and teachers. "Pay attention to our goals and don't put us down", he said. One participant said there should be positive disciplinary measures in place of corporal punishment.

7. The education of the child begins in the family, which ensures that children have a good start in life. Participants stressed the important role played by both mothers and fathers in the lives of their children. As one of the young speakers said, children have a right to live without violence in their homes. Several participants said their Governments had enacted legislation to protect children from abuse in their homes, but that it was also vital to teach and socialize policemen, children and families themselves and the rest of society to respect these laws. It was stated that while the State had the main responsibility for protecting rights, families, communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also shared that responsibility. In some cases, families require financial or other support so they can send their children to school instead of working.

8. Many speakers spoke of the devastating effects of conflict on children. Conflict harms children physically — they are abducted as child soldiers and are maimed and mutilated, injured by landmines or wounded in combat. It also prevents them from receiving immunization and health services and halts their education. Conflict also harms children emotionally and mentally, and children affected by conflict need special care and attention. Other participants spoke about other forms of exploitation of children, especially sexual exploitation, and the recent Yokohama Declaration on this issue.

9. The young people all said that words must be followed by clear action. Many participants at the round table spoke of the need for legal mechanisms to match political commitments, as well as the need for the development and implementation of national laws and judicial systems reflecting the contents of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The importance of reaching minorities and marginalized children was stressed by several participants. Many countries have children's parliaments and other means for children to express themselves, including newspapers written by children for children.

10. Many participants, including the young delegates, emphasized the importance of agreeing on the final text of the outcome document so that when everyone returned home from New York they would have something positive to build on. As one of the Co-Chairs said in closing, the future would be too ghastly to contemplate if the world did not move forwards from here.